

Subject:

National Capital Planning Commission meeting of March 3, 2022

Agenda Item No. 8147

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Virginia Avenue between C and 21st Streets, NW, Washington, DC, Reservation
378 Park Design Revisions and Reconstruction

Re. Need for Milkweed in Plant Schedule

The Planting Plan on Sheet Number LA-601 contains a plant schedule (Plant Schedule South) that lists 18 species of perennials. Sheet Number 2 LA-601 provides further information about these species.

Monarch butterfly populations are declining throughout the United States. To help reverse this decline, President Barack Obama issued on June 20, 2014, a presidential memorandum entitled "*Creating a Federal Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*".

The memorandum established a Pollinator Health Task Force, to be co-chaired by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. The memorandum further stated: "*The number of migrating Monarch butterflies sank to the lowest recorded population level in 2013–14, and there is an imminent risk of failed migration*".

In May 2015, the Pollinator Health Task Force issued a "*National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators*". The strategy laid out federal actions to achieve three goals, two of which were:

- *Monarch Butterflies: Increase the Eastern population of the monarch butterfly to 225 million butterflies occupying an area of approximately 15 acres (6 hectares) in the overwintering grounds in Mexico, through domestic/international actions and public-private partnerships, by 2020.*

- *Pollinator Habitat Acreage: Restore or enhance 7 million acres of land for pollinators over the next 5 years through Federal actions and public/private partnerships.*

Monarch butterfly caterpillars feed only on milkweed. **To help restore monarch butterfly populations and to comply with President Obama's memorandum, the National Park Service needs to include appropriate species of milkweed in every planting list that contains perennials and ground covers.**

Neither Sheet No. LA-601 nor 2 LA-601 list any species of milkweed. **The redesigned Reservation 378 Park will therefore do nothing to help restore monarch butterfly populations unless the National Park Service revises those sheets to enable them to list milkweeds.**

Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) is the only milkweed species that thrives in natural areas in the Washington, DC, area and that monarch butterfly females prefer when laying eggs (see [2018 publication by V.M. Pocius, et al.](#)). The species grows best in sunny areas (see [Monarch Watch article on Asclepias syriaca](#)). The Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History's butterfly garden in Washington, D.C. contains much *Asclepias syriaca* in its sunny areas.

Monarch females also prefer Poke Milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*) when laying eggs, although not to the same extent as they prefer *Asclepias syriaca*. However, *Asclepias exaltata* thrives in partially shaded areas (see [Monarch Watch article on Asclepias exaltata](#)), where *Asclepias syriaca* does not grow well.

Recommendation

- Add Common Milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) to the planting schedule on Sheet Nos. LA-601 and 2 LA-601, showing this species to be planted in sunny areas.

- Add Poke Milkweed (*Asclepias exaltata*) to the planting schedules on a Sheet Nos. LA-601 and 2 LA-601, showing this species to be planted in partially shaded areas, such as under trees.
- If necessary, remove grasses and other wind-pollinated plants from the planting schedules to provide space for these two milkweeds. Wind-pollinated plants do not support pollinators.

Thank you.

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